

Congressman Rothman Introduces Bill to Bring Justice to the People of Vieques

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Washington, DC – Today, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) is proud to introduce the Vieques Recovery and Development Act of 2011.

“The U.S. government must address the serious and disabling health care problems affecting the people of Vieques and this bill is the first step. These health issues were caused by more than 62 years of the U.S. bombing that island with military ordnance, which, our own government has acknowledged, created a federal superfund site that contains dozens of extremely dangerous, toxic and harmful poisons,” said Congressman Rothman. “The injustice toward the people of Vieques, Puerto Rico must end. The time for the U.S. government to right this wrong is long overdue.”

The island of Vieques is a municipality of Puerto Rico, with 10,000 residents, located eight miles east of the main island. From 1941-2003, the Navy tested nearly every kind of munitions employed by the U.S. military, dropping millions of pounds of ordnance on Vieques.

“Congressman Rothman and I share the same overriding goal – to help the people of Vieques, who have sacrificed so much on behalf of the United States and its national security. I am pleased to support this legislation, which

seeks to provide a just and lasting solution to the health-related challenges facing the residents of La Isla Nena," said Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi, Puerto Rico's representative in Washington, DC.

"I am proud to have had Commissioner Pierluisi join in this effort and for his passion on this issue," said Congressman Rothman.

After over a half a century of bombings, Viequenses — as locals are known — have a 25% higher infant mortality rate, 30% higher rate of cancer, a 381% higher rate of hypertension, a 95% higher rate of cirrhosis of the liver, and a 41% higher rate of diabetes than those on the main island. These alarming health disparities of Viequenses have never been addressed by the U.S. government. The people of Vieques are American citizens, many of whom have patriotically served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Without a doubt, Viequenses have made tremendous sacrifices for our country's national security and we have an obligation to do the right thing for these Americans.

The Vieques Recovery and Development Act of 2011 finally recognizes the sacrifices of Viequenses and attempts to address this injustice once and for all by:

- Constructing a state-of-the-art hospital and toxins research center that would provide preventative care and treat illnesses prevalent on Vieques, such as cancer;
- Performing studies and providing recommendations at the research center on the existence and prevalence of toxins that impact the people and environment of Vieques;
- Establishing a federal interagency plan to ensure that Viequenses benefit from federal resources across government agencies; and
- Settling all personal claims by Viequenses against the U.S. Government by setting up a compensation fund.

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